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ABSTRACT

This guide to the Latch Key program for after-school day care explores rationale and methods for developing Latch Key programs in the public schools to provide low cost after-school care for children (grades 1-6) of working or student parents. (Some programs have been provided for kindergarten children and some have been expanded to full time during summer and holiday periods.) The booklet outlines Latch Key program goals and the community education concept of maximum use of tax-supported schools to meet the needs of all age groups in the community. Community support factors are cited and support and financing strategies described. A section on leadership, staffing and training covers the coordinator's role, use of public school and paraprofessional personnel, and inservice training. A section on parent participation deals with the crucial role of parent advisory groups and the need for informal parent involvement. Discussion of program operation considers relationships with regular school personnel, state licensing regulations, personnel standards and program evaluation. (BF)

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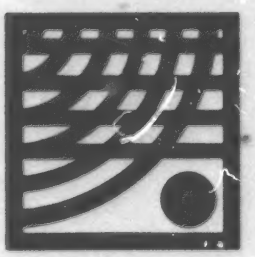
LATCH KEY

DEVELOPING CHILD CARE PROGRAMS THROUGH COMMUNITY EDUCATION



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INTRODUCTION

Day care programs have proliferated in recent years with emphasis on full day care for pre-school children. However, there is a great need which is only slowly being recognized for after-school and summer care for young children of school age. In most communities, such care is unavailable or, at best, inadequate. Often children of these ages go home alone and let themselves into empty houses to watch T.V. until their parents come home.

The need for after-school and summer care is slowly gaining priority within the day care community. Private day care providers are becoming involved, but often the logistics for providing care for a large influx of children who come to a program for a short period of time are difficult and finding space that is available during those hours after school is difficult. It has seemed to many that the logical place to provide after-school care is within the school itself since the children are already there and facilities are available. Some communities have responded by developing after-school programs in the school setting under the auspices of the Community Education Departments. This monograph will examine the rationale and the method of developing such a program.

LATCH KEY IS FUN

WHAT IS LATCH KEY?

Latch Key is a program which provides after-school day care for the children of working or student parents. Some programs provide for kindergarten age children as well as for after-school care for grades 1-6. Programs are often expanded to full time during summer and holiday periods.

Goals:

1. To provide low cost quality day care to the children of working parents.
2. To provide a program which coordinates with and complements a child's school experience.
3. To be responsive to the expressed needs and stated values of parents.
4. To maximize the use of public resources by more fully utilizing school space and personnel.
5. To make big city schools more attractive by offering a service which fills an unmet community need.
6. To strengthen the community and to foster community development by providing a day care option for parents.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND WHY USE PUBLIC SCHOOL FACILITIES?

We have schools in our neighborhoods that were built with tax dollars and should get maximum use. The Community Education concept is made operational through the local school which can act as a catalyst in identifying resources that can be pulled together and work cooperatively for the solution of community

problems. Programs and services can be expanded to serve the needs of all age groups in the community, from pre-sch[illegible]s to senior citizens. Child care problems such as Latch Key logically fit into the Community Education concept.

The Community School emphasizes parental involvement, stresses education as a lifelong process, and recognizes that schools should be used year-round on an expanded schedule. A logical place for Latch Key programs to develop is within the schools. The children are already there and so transportation does not become a problem. Facilities such as gym and playgrounds are available.

CLIMATE FOR SUCCESS

As indicated above, the operation of day care programs, of which Latch Key is an example, is a rather new development in public education. It is a program that is intimately related to a network of factors, people and institutions, within the school system and with the "outside community," that interact in a sophisticated interface. It is important to study the component elements and to explore how they relate to each other. We can define our "climate for success" only if we observe the dynamic ebb and flow of these interlocking factors.

A. Commitment by Board of Education to a viewpoint that educational responsibility encompasses more than the teaching of traditional subject matter.

There must be a commitment to a philosophy that the school district is responsible for providing services for informal as well as formal education.[1]

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1 See Appendix.

B. Cooperative relationship between administrative, teaching support and custodial staff.

Children cannot be recruited, or facilities jointly "inhabited," unless regular school staff believe that this added service is needed. When a school faculty believes that the facility and its resources belongs in the community, a favorable climate for success exists.[2]

C. Parent Involvement

A child care program is an extension of the parental right and responsibility to rear children. The individual family's values and life-styles must be reflected in the child care program. Without this vital input, we are in danger of developing a program for the raising of children by the state, which we do not advocate.

D. Competent Leadership

Staff must provide strong leadership that can develop direct programs with children and involve the human resources found in the family and the community, and in the school system itself. The child care center cannot provide its rearing services "lone ranger" style. Leadership must responsibly seek out, and effectively integrate, the important people in the child's life.

E. Institutional Interface

If the program is to run effectively, it is necessary to assume that facilities and personnel, in all areas of the school and the community, will be used in a coordinated and cooperative fashion. A systematic effort to

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2 See section on use of school personnel.

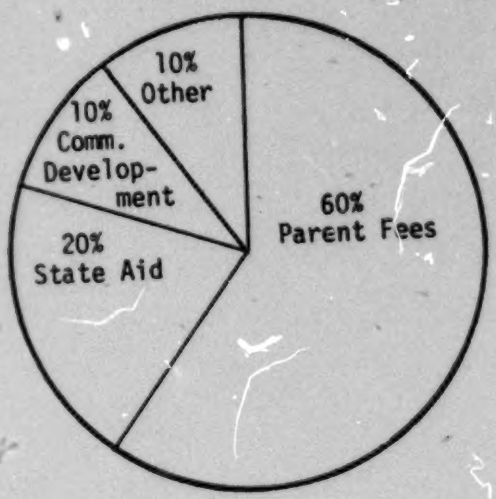
use the physical and human resources already available in the schools and community costs little in extra cash.[3] What is involved is individuals and groups redistriouting their energies to relate to the Latch Key program.

A child care program backed up by a well established facility and staff, such as you find in most schools, costs much less than if the same program were set up independently in the community.

SUPPORT AND FINANCING

The financial requirements and sources of support are as varied as the communities in which Latch Key sites are implemented. In many cases, multi-source funding is used. For example:

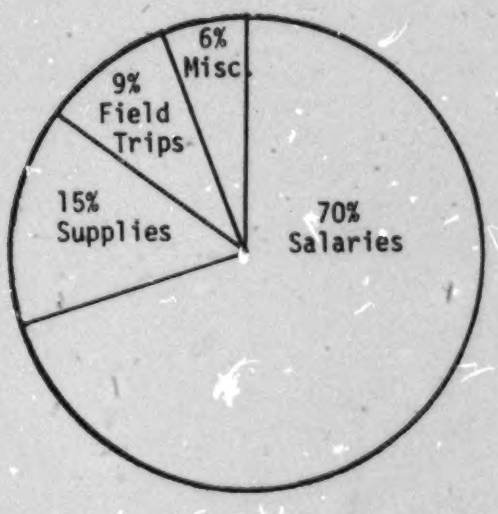
INCOME



3 There are added direct service costs - specific staff and supplies. These are minimal compared to building costs and salaries for custodial, administrative and support staff.

It is also possible to support a program solely from parent fees which may go primarily for staff salaries. When using public school facilities, the overhead costs are often absorbed through the regular school budget. When planning a budget, one should consider funding sources such as private contributions, business and industry support, special state aid, special fund raising events, student fees, and co-sponsoring agencies (such as city government).

EXPENSE



Another "spin off" advantage of a Latch Key program which has a relationship with the public school is that it is possible to tap "people resources" such as social workers, counselors, teachers, and health service support staff. Oftentimes these professionals will give their services to the Latch Key program as a part of their regular duties.

Some of the personnel needs can be met by using volunteers from the community. Each community has people who have special skills or hobbies and who are willing to donate their time.

LEADERSHIP, STAFFING, AND TRAINING

Coordinator:

The coordinator at each Latch Key site is responsible for program development and administration. This coordinator should have experience in working with children in addition to administrative and organizational skills. It is important that the coordinator be warm and outgoing as well as flexible and adaptable.

Coordinator duties include:

1. Recruit and hire staff (with significant input from the parent advisory group).
2. Meet regularly with the parent advisory group to enlist their input and support.
3. Represent their program on area day care committees.
4. Develop budget, keep records, collect fees.
5. Develop and maintain good working relationships with school personnel and community groups.
6. Enlist the input of teachers and school support staff in developing program.
7. Conduct staff meetings on a regular basis. Plan for staff development.
8. Work with parent advisory group on funding proposals.
9. Inventory and keep track of equipment and supplies.
10. Attend city-wide coordinator meetings.
11. Participate in in-service training.
12. Work directly with the children at least 50% of the time.
13. Work with the Director of the Community Education program, if there is one, to coordinate the Latch Key program with the after-school program.

City-Wide Coordinator:

If there are a number of Latch Key sites in a school district, it may be advisable to have an area-wide coordinator of Latch Key and related services. The duties of such a coordinator would include:

1. Develop and carry out an in-service program for Latch Key staff.
2. Serve as a liaison between Latch Key programs and Community Education Administration.
3. Develop a handbook on Latch Key and keep it up to date.
4. Set up standard procedures for budgeting, accounting, and obtaining supplies through school channels for all Latch Key sites.
5. Develop guidelines and procedures for starting new Latch Key programs.
6. Work with each site on proposal writing.
7. Represent Latch Key on day care meetings and task forces.
8. Work with the Welfare Department to set up licensing requirements which are appropriate to day care programs operating within a school.
9. Keep informed on local, state and national legislative developments regarding day care.

Use of interns, parents, volunteers.

Latch Key programs attempt to recruit qualified staff at low cost. Possible sources for obtaining such staff include:

1. Urban Corps interns.
2. Neighborhood Youth Corps.
3. Foster Grandparents.
4. University interns in various undergraduate and graduate programs... Social Work, Education, Community Education, Child Development, etc.
5. Parent volunteers (Latch Key parents are by definition busy people, but often they will share particular skills and interests on a short-term basis.)
6. Senior citizen volunteers.

In-Service Training:

Because of the diversity in background and interest within Latch Key staffs, in-service training is a necessity. Areas where training is most needed should be identified by individual Latch Key staffs in response to actual experiences. Possible sessions might include:

- Creative play
- Child development...ages and stages
- Values clarification
- Sexism in materials and program relationship of Latch Key to day program
- Cultural identity in child care
- Inexpensive crafts
- Macrame
- Group games
- Cooking with children
- Movement and music
- Discipline
- Paper folding

Special in-service training for coordinators might include:

- Budgeting
- Accounting
- Staff development
- Proposal writing
- Developing effective parent advisory groups
- Sharing sessions with other coordinators... field trips, projects, etc.

Use of School Personnel:

Latch Key in a school has access to a wide variety of staff resources which can be called upon to serve children in an informal school setting as well as a formal setting at no extra cost. Some may actually have day-to-day involvement. Examples of this kind of resources include:

- Health personnel-school nurse
- School social worker
- School psychiatrist
- Counselor
- In-service training
- Administrative services
- Custodians
- Community Education personnel

PROGRAM AND CURRICULUM

Latch Key programs attempt to provide activities which both enrich and complement the child's school experience. They are the product of a unique interface of Latch Key staff with teachers, school support staff, parents, community schools, and area day care committees

Kindergarten programs vary from after-school programs in that the children are in the program for a longer period of time and the children are the same age.[4] Latch Key kindergarten staff meet with the child's kindergarten teacher and observe a child's kindergarten class in session. This facilitates the planning of an appropriate program. There is an emphasis on providing

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4 This makes the assumption that the regular school kindergarten program is one-half day in duration.

options and choices, and free time for play is an important part of the day.

Sample kindergarten day:

Lunch

Quiet period

Interest stations - here the child may choose from five or six activities such as music, painting, puzzles, microscopes, blocks.

Learning stations - fifteen or twenty minutes are spent learning such things as tieing shoes, zipping coats, counting, learning addresses and phone numbers.

Free play with a large muscle option - tumbling, playground, gym, etc.

After-school programs must provide for a wide range of ages and interests. Many choices are offered and field trips are frequent. If a community school is operating in a Latch Key site, children are encouraged to participate in programs offered, i.e., woodshop, pottery, gymnastics, guitar, learning a foreign language, etc.

Sample after-school day:

Snack

Short group meeting

Divide into activity groups for the day. Options (usually 5 or 6) are posted and always include at least one choice in each area:

- Large muscle activity - gym, playground, tumbling, soccer.
- Small muscle activity - table games, science, puzzles.
- Creative arts - crafts, woodwork, projects, free time, or a quiet corner is always an option.
- Homework corner.

Field Trips:

Field trips are stressed as an integral part of Latch Key programs. Examples of possible field trips are:

fire station	movies	newspaper
nature center	roller skating	nursing homes
bakery	farm	rock hunting
museums	plays	zoo
police station	circus	ice skating
swimming	galleries	bowling
hay rides	hospitals	TV station

Because of the wide age range in after-school programs, some field trips are planned for children of a specific age. Often buses or vans are hired to provide transportation, but public transit is used whenever possible.

PARENT PARTICIPATION

Parent Advisory Groups:

Parent advisory groups are the key to any successful Latch Key program. Because Latch Key sites are developed in response to expressed parent need, parents are involved from the beginning. The parent group not only initiates

the development of Latch Key sites, they also interview and recommend selection of Latch Key staff.

Parent groups meet with the coordinator on a regular (usually monthly) basis. Parents help set policy, make decisions regarding fees, suggest program, and work with the coordinator on proposal writing.

If there are several Latch Key sites in an area, it may be useful for parent representatives from each group to meet to share experiences and concerns. Issues may arise where a coordinated effort of all Latch Key groups may be needed. An example of such an issue might be lobbying for a particular piece of legislation or the seeking of school board support for the development of Latch Key programs.

Because Latch Key parents are working parents, it is particularly difficult for them to find time to participate in the parent group. It has been found that meetings over the dinner hour (coinciding with the time that parents pick up their children) are most successful. Light supper is served (in one program the children prepare the dinner) and child care is provided.

Informal Parent Participation:

It is unrealistic to assume that participation in a parent advisory group will be 100%. However, it is important to keep all the parents informed and to provide feedback channels for them. Regular newsletters are essential in keeping the parents informed of what is going on in the Latch Key program. It is also important that coordinators make an effort to speak to the parents when they pick their children up, even if it is only briefly. At least twice a year, conferences with parents should be scheduled. Busy parents should have the option of a telephone conference if their schedule does not permit them to come to the school.

EVALUATION

In child care programs, evaluation is a useful tool used for making successful decisions. Through properly carried out evaluations, decisions can be made to improve the overall operation.

Evaluation should never been seen as an end in itself, but as one important process through which a program can reach its full potential.

A first consideration involves good record keeping. Certain information should be tallied and kept on hand:

- Daily attendance
- Monies collected and spent
- Staff schedules
- Rooms used and number of programs
- Daily journal or log

Objectives of a Latch Key program should be clearly laid out by the advisory council, staff, and administration. When agreed upon objectives are established, performance can be measured through various techniques.

Information coming from such questions as the following may be gathered:

- What activities are working best?
- What changes in attitude are taking place?
- What kinds of parental feedback are you receiving?
- What are staff recommendations?
- In what areas are we possibly lacking in accountability?

Evaluations need not be complicated. A good evaluation system will provide you the information you desire with the least possible expenditure of time and resources.

When starting up a new program, it is important to assess the community need for after-school care. Some suggestions for collecting this kind of information are:

1. Send a survey questionnaire home with children in all the schools that serve the neighborhood. (Don't forget the parochial schools!)
2. Write articles for neighborhood publications...newspapers, school newsletters, church bulletins, etc.
3. Set up a booth at kindergarten roundups with literature, applications, and enthusiastic parents to explain the proposed program.

These techniques are also useful in recruiting children for ongoing programs.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS

If one decides that it is within the domain of public education to provide child care services, there are a number of operational details that need to be considered, none of which are minor.

1. Working out relationships with work groups who customarily use and/or maintain the building during the "regular school day."

   Custodial Staff

   The job description of the custodial staff in an average school does not provide sufficient flexibility in scheduling and/or job

responsibilities to fit the needs of an after-school child care program. More than one such program has failed to get off the drawing board because of difficulties encountered in this area. A school district contemplating the development of an after-school child care program should negotiate the working responsibilities of custodial staff in this program through the proper union channels.

Daytime Teaching Staff

The daytime teacher may find it difficult to adjust to the possibility that the classroom will be used, and perhaps re-arranged, by the after-school program. This situation can cause inconvenience. The classroom teacher should be involved in the planning of after-school programs to secure his/her commitment to the program.

Joint use of school plant by regular and after-school programs is potentially awkward. It can be assumed that usage will result in wear and tear, and some breakage, of facilities. The district should plan for a working agreement between the parties involved in regard to how facilities will be used and damages paid for.

2. Working with the state to develop licensing regulations that are appropriate to the school settings.

Frequently state licensing regulations have been designed for pre-school children housed in private community buildings. They may be rather unrelated to the needs of school age children in the after-school program. The health and safety measures specified in licensing regulations should be the same as those required for children during the regular school day.

3. Developing standards for the hiring of personnel.

If the district assumes responsibility for running a child care program, it becomes necessary to assume responsibility for the proper staffing of such. This can get very complicated.

Many child care facilities make use of parents as staff. They consider this an important aspect of the program. Can this asset be continued within a framework of district hiring and supervising of staff? This issue can have very special relevance to the decision on the part of the district to use, or not to use, certified teaching staff in such positions.

Aide (paraprofessional) staff is used in child care programs. It is both adequate and economically feasible. Aides tend to become part of the civil service hiring system. This means that specific personnel can be assigned to a child care program that may, or may not, be the choice of the parents sending their children to this facility.

4. Developing and maintaining parental involvement.

This endeavor has been mentioned several times in this article. We mention it again in closing. Securing this involvement is difficult at best. We feel, though, that it is of utmost importance that parents have significant input into the program. They are essential. The involvement of parents as volunteers in the program is also desirable when their time permits.

Public schools can respond to today's needs of children and their parents. School hours should not look like the old banking hours where children can only be "deposited and withdrawn" at the convenience of the institution. When public schools are used, the response of parents is enthusiastic.

"I really appreciate Latch Key! Our day begins at 8:00 AM and we don't see each other again until 5:30. Where Tony and Nola's school day leaves off, Latch Key begins. At Latch Key they get snacks, rest, exercise, fun things to do, attention and discipline. And for us, the sliding fee scale is a blessing. With the sliding fee scale, we can make it financially. If I had to pay the going rates for child care, it would be a disaster for all three of us. ...One more thing, and it is important, Tony and Nola are happy there!" - D.B.

"Being both an instructor and a graduate student to the University of Minn., it has been vital that I find quality after-kindergarten care for my son. Had I not been most satisfied with the Latch Key program, I would rather have left school and employment than place my son in any of the alternatives that exist. From a societal perspective, it is necessary to support existing alternatives and create new ones for the growing numbers of working mothers." - W.R.

"Because my child can attend Latch Key, I am able to support both of us without the need of AFDC funds. Because of the Before-School Program, I am able to work 8 hours daily and take the bus rather than spend Saturdays making up working hours. As a single parent, I find Latch Key very supportive to my role as parent and breadwinner. My child has a secure and happy place to be before and after school, releasing me to be a productive citizen and wage earner." - S.C.

An analysis of educational programs should be undertaken by school officials and community members. These are times when significant service improvements can be made with minimal cost. The advantages for children far outweigh the nuisance of a new program model, and often school/community relationships can be greatly improved!

APPENDIX

POSITION PAPER

(Developed by parents and staff in the Minneapolis School System)
(for approval by the School Board)

The number of families with both parents (or the only parent) working or going to school is high and is increasing for a number of reasons. Existing opportunities for school age child care, particularly for low income families, are few. Child care availability directly affects family life, the job market, the quality of neighborhoods, school enrollments and attitudes toward schools.

CURRENT NEED:

...There are growing numbers of families where either both parents work or where the family is headed by a single parent who works. In addition, many parents are in school full time. (Mpls. has 16,353 families with single female heads, 3,083 families with single male heads.)

...School age children of these families are often in need of child care during the hours between the end of school and the end of the working day. For a large percentage of these children, existing care is informal or simply does not exist. (Child care for school age children has consistently been given a low priority for funding/space.)

...Low cost care for low income families (just above welfare) is especially scarce.

RATIONALE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF CHILD CARE PROGRAMS:

...Family well-being can be assisted when working parents know children are well cared for.

...The availability of quality, low cost child care benefits the working force of the community.

...Housing patterns and stable residency in a neighborhood are related to the availability of services that support the family.

RATIONALE FOR SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT:

...Enrollment in public schools can be influenced by the existence of services such as after-school child care. Parents may opt for public school over other choices.

...Attitudes toward big city schools can become more positive when efforts are made toward meeting a need (such as after-school child care).

...Since children are already in school building, the school is a logical place for an after-school child care program.

...Using school space for such programs, when space is available, is in keeping with a philosophy of maximizing the use of public buildings.

...School support personnel and teachers can be resources for the after-school staff in developing a program which both enriches and complements the child's school experience.

...In schools where the community school provides after-school activities for children, it is logical that an after-school day care program interface with these resources.

CURRENT LATCH KEY PROGRAMS:

...There are 9 programs currently in operation, with several others in the developmental stage. Services vary with each site and range from total day service starting before school, morning, afternoon and late afternoon sessions to programs that just operate after the regular school day from 3:00 PM on; others have various combinations of service units.

...All programs were developed jointly by Community Education, GMDCA, and area day care committees.

...All programs are totally self-supporting (no Board Fund 1 involved). Programs are supported by parent fees, grants for the Child Care Facilities Act, subgrants from Title XX, and some contributions from private business.

...Most programs offer a sliding fee scale with fees determined by ability to pay.

...All programs have active parent advisory groups which meet regularly to guide policy, participate in program planning, help recruit staff, and make decisions on fee schedules. There is also a city-wide parent advisory group with representatives from each site.

...Latch Key programs vary from site to site, but in all there is an emphasis on complementing the school experience. Field trips are emphasized and offer a wide variety of out-of-school enrichment experiences.

We, the parents of Latch Key children, feel that the Latch Key program in the Minneapolis Public Schools is an important and essential community service. We therefore ask that:

1. The Board of Education recognize the Latch Key program as an important and contributing support service to the Minneapolis Public Schools.

2. That space be permitted for the operation of Latch Key programs when space is available and does not conflict with day school needs.

3. That Latch Key be given the same support and maintenance that other support services receive.

4. That schools be made available for Latch Key programs during vacation periods as long as engineer schedules can be maintained.